

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0450
INFO AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION SINAI
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 15279

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, EG, IS, US
SUBJ: ISRAELI RESPONSE TO U.S. QUESTIONS LOOMS LARGE IN
- EGYPTIAN PERSPECTIVE

SUMMARY: EGYPTIAN LEADERS AWAIT ISRAELI RESPONSE TO
U.S. QUESTIONS AS CULMINATION OF PEACE PROCESS OF PAST
FOUR YEARS AND WOULD AGREE WITH ATHERTON'S STATEMENT THAT
IT OFFERS PERHAPS ONLY POSSIBILITY FOR RENEWING NEGOTIA-
TIONS. THEY PLACE ONUS FOR STALEMATE SQUARELY ON
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BEGIN AND CLAIM THAT HIS CONTINUING "AGGRESSIVE" POLICIES
IN OCCUPIED TERRITORIES EVIDENCE OF DESIRE TO SCUTTLE
PEACE EFFORT. CONFIDENCE IN SADAT'S LEADERSHIP SHAKEN AS
INCREASING NUMBER VIEW HIS RELIANCE ON U.S. AND INITIATIVE
AS "NAIVE". WHATEVER SUPPORT MAY HAVE EXISTED FOR
SEPARATE AGREEMENT NOW DISSIPATED. EGYPTIANS FROM SADAT
DOWN CONVINCED USG INTERVENTION OFFERS ONLY PROSPECT OF

PROGRESS. SADAT BELIEVES HE HAS FULLY RESPONDED TO U.S. REQUESTS AND HE WILL EXPECT US TO PRESS ISRAEL. ANY HINT OF EROSION IN OUR POSITION COULD RESULT IN FIRST UNDERMINING OF SADAT'S CONFIDENCE IN U.S. THUS OUR REACTION WILL BE AS CLOSELY SCRUTINIZED AS ISRAELI ANSWERS THEMSELVES. END SUMMARY.

1. ISRAELI RESPONSE THIS SUNDAY TO U.S. QUESTIONS ON DISPOSITION OF WEST BANK AND GAZA HAS TAKEN ON ENORMOUS SIGNIFICANCE IN MINDS OF EGYPTIAN LEADERS. AS MANY PREVIOUS TURNING POINTS, IT IS SEEN AS CULMINATION OF PROCESS OF LAST FOUR YEARS. RESPONSE GIVEN ADDED WEIGHT BECAUSE OF DELAYS AND WELL-PUBLICIZED DIVISION WITHIN ISRAELI CABINET IN TRYING ARRIVE AT DECISION. MORE CONSPIRATORIAL MINDS, AND THERE ARE AS MANY IN EGYPT AS THERE ARE IN ISRAEL, SEE ISRAELI CABINET MANEUVERING AS "TYPICAL" ISRAELI DELAY ACTION RATHER THAN DEMOCRATIC PROCESS AT WORK. MOST KNOWLEDGEABLE EGYPTIANS WOULD AGREE WITH AHERTON STATEMENT IN LOS ANGELES THAT POSITIVE ISRAELI RESPONSES OFFER "PERHAPS THE ONLY POSSIBILITY OF RENEWING THE MOMENTUM OF THE EGYPTIAN/ISRAELI TALKS AND AUTOMATICALLY THE OVERALL ARAB/ISRAELI NEGOTIATING PROCESS." BY FAR THE GREATER NUMBER OF EGYPTIANS WITH WHOM WE TALK HAVE CONCLUDED THERE IS ONLY FAINT HOPE LEFT THAT SADAT'S PEACE INITIATIVE STILL LIVES. THE ETERNAL OPTIMIST, CONFIDENTIAL

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SADAT STILL PROFESSES TO BE HOPEFUL, BUT EVEN HE HAS BEGUN TO CAUTION THAT PRESENT PEACE INITIATIVE COULD ABORT AND THAT IF IT DOES, THIS IS NOT THE END OF THE WORLD. MOST OF SADAT'S PRINCIPAL ADVISERS, AMONG THEM FONMIN KAMEL, PRIVATELY EXPRESS PROFOUND PESSIMISM ABOUT PROSPECTS.

2. PREDICTABLY, EGYPTIANS PLACE ONUS FOR STALEMATED PEACE PROCESS SQUARELY ON THE ISRAELIS AND PRIMARILY ON BEGIN. BEGIN, THEY BELIEVE, HAS PURPOSEFULLY SOUGHT TO SCUTTLE PEACE EFFORT. THE ONCE HELD VIEW, PARTLY AS A RESULT OF OUR EFFORTS, THAT BEGIN AS PRIMIN IN HISTORICAL PERIOD RATHER THAN OPPOSITION LEADER, MIGHT BE WILLING SHOW SOME FLEXIBILITY DIED QUICKLY AS EGYPTIANS SAW ISRAELI PRIMIN IN ACTION. ONE HEARS MORE AND MORE COMMENTS BY EGYPTIANS--AND FOREIGN DIPLOMATS HERE AS WELL--THAT A SETTLEMENT IS IMPOSSIBLE AS LONG AS BEGIN REMAINS IN OFFICE. THIS VIEW IS BASED NOT ONLY ON WHAT EGYPTIANS CONSIDER THE INADEQUACY OF BEGIN'S RESPONSE TO SADAT INITIATIVE BY DEMANDING INTER ALIA EXTRA-TERRITORIAL CONCESSIONS IN SINAI (WHICH IMMEDIATELY RAISED SPECTRE OF 19TH CENTURY COLONIALISM), BUT ON

WHAT THEY DESCRIBE AS CONTINUING "AGGRESSIVE" NATURE OF
ISRAELI EXPANSION OF SETTLEMENTS AND EXPLOITATION OF
NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES.
EGYPTIANS ARE ALSO PUZZLED AND BITTER AT WHAT THEY
PERCEIVE TO BE BEGIN'S INSENSITIVITY TO EGYPTIAN FEEL-
INGS, ESPECIALLY AFTER SADAT'S TRIP TO JERUSALEM, AND
ASK HOW ISRAELI PRIMIN COULD SEEK TO HUMILIATE SADAT BY

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DEMANDS THAT ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS REMAIN IN SINAI PRO-
TECTED BY IDF FORCES.

3. AS PERCEIVED ISRAELI INTRANSIGENCE GROWS, EGYPTIANS
ALSO BECOME MORE SENSITIVE TO VIEWS OF OTHER ARABS WHO
HAVE FROM OUTSET BEEN SKEPTICAL OF WISDOM OF SADAT'S
INITIATIVE. EGYPTIAN EFFORTS PERSUADE OTHER ARABS,
INCLUDING MODERATE JORDANIANS AND PALESTINAIANS, THAT

NOW WOULD BE GOOD TIME TO REINFORCE IMPACT OF SADAT'S
INITIATIVE BY JOINING IN NEGOTIATIONS (JORDAN)
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OR PUBLICLY SUPPORTING INITIATIVE (SAUDIS), THEY ADMIT,
HAVE BEEN MET WITH DISBELIEF. THEY ARE SENSITIVE TO
FREQUENTLY HEARD ARAB CHARGE THAT SADAT IS TODAY
STANDING NAKED AND EMPTY HANDED BEFORE BEGIN. CONFI-
DENCE IN SADAT'S LEADERSHIP HAS INEVITABLY BEEN SHAKEN
AS SENTIMENT HAS GROWN THAT HE WAS NAIVE TO PUT SUCH
CONFIDENCE IN U.S. (HAYKAL'S FAVORITE THEME) AND TO
THINK HIS MAGNANIMITY WOULD BE RECIPROCATED BY
HARD-NOSED ISRAELIS. THERE IS PARTICULAR BITTERNESS
THAT SADAT'S NORMALIZATION OFFER, WIDELY REGARDED HERE
AS RESULT OF USG PRESSURE, SHOULD SIMPLY HAVE BEEN
POCKETED BY BEGIN WITHOUT ANY COMPARABLE QUID
PRO QUO. SOME PRIVATELY CHARGE THAT SADAT WAS NAIVE
TO PLAY THIS CRITICAL CARD SO SOON AND WITHOUT A FIRM
ASSURANCE OF A COMMENSURATE ISRAELI RETURN.

4. SEPARATE AGREEMENT. EGYPTIANS ARE KEENLY AWARE OF ISRAELI
DESIRE CONCLUDE SEPARATE PEACE. SIX MONTHS AGO THERE WAS
CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR IDEA; TODAY, AS RESULT OF
WHAT EGYPTIANS CALL ISRAELI INTRANSIGENCE, MOST OF THAT
SUPPORT HAS ERODED AND ISRAELI DESIGN IS SEEN AS SINISTER
EFFORT DIVIE ARAB WORLD. (WHEN
PRESSED, EGYPTIANS WILL RUEFULLY ADMIT THAT ARABS ARE
FULLY CAPABLE OF DOING THIS THEMSELVES.) SADAT, IN
OUR VIEW, WOULD STILL LIKE AN EARLY SETTLEMENT WITH
ISRAEL, BUT NOT AT PRICE OF ALIENATING EGYPT PERMANENT-
LY FROM ARAB WORLD. HENCE, A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT,
(IN SPACE, NOT IN TIME) HAS FROM OUTSET BEEN SADAT'S
GOAL AND HE HAS REPEATEDLY SPELLED OUT HIS RATIONALE
FOR THIS. ISRAELIS MAY VIEW THIS AS STUBBORNNESS ON
SADAT'S PART, BUT IT IS WORTH BEARING IN MIND THAT WE
TOO URGED SADAT, WHEN HE TOOK JERUSALEM TRIP, NOT
TO GO FOR SEPARATE AGREEMENT BUT TO CONTINUE TO WORK
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FOR A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT.

5. ISRAELIS ARE RIGHT WHEN THEY SAY SADAT HAS A
PENCHANT FOR "UNPREDICTABILITY", BUT HIS UNPREDICTABIL-
ITY LIES MAINLY IN THE TACTICAL RATHER THAN POLICY
AREAS. THE FACT OF THE MATTER IS THAT SADAT HAS
THROUGHOUT PEACE PROCESS BEEN REMARKABLY CONSISTENT IN

HIS DEMANDS FOR ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM OCCUPIED TERRITORIES (WITH MINOR RECTIFICATIONS IN WEST BANK) AND SOME KIND OF PALESTINIAN SELF-DETERMINATION. ISRAELIS MAKE THE MISTAKE OF TAKING TOO LITERALLY THE SPATE OF PRONOUNCEMENTS THAT COME FROM THE PRESIDENT. HE IS A CONCEPTUALIST AND THE THRUST OF HIS COMMENT RATHER THAN THE SPECIFIC WORDS IS WHAT SHOULD BE ANALYZED. AND THIS HAS BEEN REMARKABLY STEADY. ISRAELI EFFORTS DRAW SADAT INTO WEST BANK/GAZA NEGOTIATIONS CLEARLY POSES DOMESTIC AND ARAB PROBLEMS FOR HIM AND HE HAS THEREFORE REACTED WITH GREAT CAUTION. HE IS AWARE THAT WHILE EGYPT CAN RIGHTLY CLAIM A ROLE IN GAZA SETTLEMENT, IT HAS NO AUTHORIZED STANDING AT THIS POINT IN ANY WEST BANK NEGOTIATIONS.

6. ROLE OF U.S.: EGYPTIANS FROM SADAT DOWN ARE CONVINCED THAT ACTIVE USG INTERVENTION IN ME PEACE PROCESS OFFERS ONLY PROSPECT OF BRINGING ANY RESULTS. SADAT BELIEVES HE HAS FULLY RESPONDED TO ALL REQUESTS PUT TO HIM BY PRESIDENT CARTER AND PREVIOUS ADMINIGTRATIONS AND, AS HE HAS REPEATEDLY STATED, WANTS USG TO PARTICIPATE AS "FULL PARTNER" IN NEGOTIATIONS. IF ISRAELI RESPONSE TO U.S. QUESTIONS IS NEGATIVE OR INCONCLUSIVE, SADAT WILL EXPECT US TO PRESS THE ISRAELIS THAT UN RESOLUTION STILL MEANS WITHDRAWAL ON ALL FRONTS. ANY HINT OF EROSION IN USG POSITION AT THIS JUNCTURE WILL HAVE DEMORALIZING IMPACT ON SADAT AND HIS ADVISERS. IT WOULD NOT NECESSARILY MEAN THE END OF THE ROAD BUT IT COULD RESULT IN THE FIRST UNDERMINING OF SADAT'S
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CONFIDENCE IN US. THUS, OUR REACTION TO ISRAELI RESPONSE WILL BE SCRUTINIZED BY EGYPTIANS AS MUCH AS THE ISRAELI ANSWERS WILL BE. EILTS

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